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# ***Wrestling Observer Newsletter***

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SummerSlam, like WrestleMania three years earlier, was born in Madison Square Garden, 25 years ago this week, on August 29, 1988.

It was the WWF's third concept PPV. Survivor Series debuted in 1987 as a way to combat Jim Crockett Promotions' Starrcade. The concept wasn't to compete head-on for viewers, but with a power play to keep viewers from having any option as WWF, an established brand, would not allow cable companies to carry its show if they carried the rival show. The Royal Rumble debuted eight months before SummerSlam, but the first national Rumble was a USA Network special scheduled on January 24, 1988, the same night cable companies guaranteed Crockett they would carry his show. McMahon took the free TV route to combat it.

SummerSlam, on the other hand, was born on the idea that there was an audience for more than two PPV shows annually. The concept has been a success, as for years it was generally the second biggest PPV show of the year, until the last decade, when it was generally third behind Royal Rumble and WrestleMania.

The debut show, selling out MSG with 20,000 fans paying \$355,345 and drawing about 400,000 buys in a much smaller universe, was built around the Mega Powers uniting. It was Hulk Hogan & Randy Savage as a tag team, against Million Dollar Man Ted DiBiase, and his paid mercenary, Andre the Giant. Each side had its secret weapon. The referee was Jesse Ventura, the well known heel announcer, but the Mega Powers' secret weapon was promising that Elizabeth, the first true glamour girl of her type in the business on a national basis, would at some point be wearing an itty bitty teeny weenie yellow polka dot bikini (lyrics of a popular song from 20 years earlier) and that would distract the heels.

It didn't quite happen as advertised. As the match went to its climax, Elizabeth, all dressed up, took off her dress and was wearing a relatively conservative by modern standards bikini bottom. But the heels were distracted, and when Savage had DiBiase pinned, Ventura didn't want to count, but had no choice.

The other key match on the show was the putting the stamp on the rise of the Ultimate Warrior, groomed to be the company's No. 2 star. Warrior, as a surprise unadvertised replacement after an injury angle to Brutus Beefcake, pinned Intercontinental champion Honky Tonk Man in 31 seconds. This was when the IC champion was considered a serious No. 2 belt. This was a huge deal as Honky Tonk Man had held the title a record-setting 15 months.

The second SummerSlam, held at the Meadowlands Arena (now Izod Center) in East Rutherford, NJ, was one of the most successful in history, doing 625,000 buys, the third largest of all-time. The show opened with a match which probably looks better on paper today than it was at the time. Arn Anderson & Tully Blanchard beat The Hart Foundation (Bret Hart & Jim Neidhart). At the time it was a match up of two of the best tag teams in the world. Today it would be looked at as a high-profile PPV match of the greatest American tag teams of all-time.

The match was nothing remarkable.

While Warrior regaining the IC title that he had lost to Rick Rude in one of his few pinfall losses of his WWF career, it was once again all about the main event.

The movie "No Holds Barred" was hardly a cinematic success. It wasn't quite the financial failure it was often joked to be (\$16 million theatrical gross; \$8 million budget, which is not necessarily profitable but wouldn't be huge losses either). The best thing that can be said about it was that it was campy bad. The final season pitted the

babyface, Rip, character played by Hulk Hogan, who was essentially Hulk Hogan, against an even bigger, meaner looking muscle head played by actor Tom "Tiny" Lister, known in the movie as Zeus. Zeus was then brought to television for a few appearances. While really 6-foot-4, he was given giant lifts in his boots to make him appear to tower over Hogan in angles and was billed at 6-foot-10. In brawls, he no sold everything and would knock people out with one blow. The problem was that Zeus wasn't a wrestler. But the Zeus character as the unstoppable monster was getting over, and make no mistake about it, the PPV number, even for a tag match, was due to the great way he was portrayed as a monster and Hogan's biggest threat of his run. Hogan vs. Zeus was simply not a match that could be done, because Zeus was that green, so they put Zeus with Savage, who had turned heel on Hogan earlier in the year to build WrestleMania. Hogan teamed with Brutus Beefcake. While a Hogan vs. Zeus singles match would have been the biggest match possible if they had been able to limit Zeus' appearances and protected him in this bout, the finish of this match said that they felt they couldn't risk him in a singles match, so Hogan pinned him after the legdrop and he was essentially gone after a few more appearances.

The third SummerSlam had a unique distinction of having the first legitimate double main event. Warrior, who had beaten Hogan for the WWF title at WrestleMania, was defending in a cage match against Rude, with them playing up Rude's IC title win a few years earlier. Warrior won with a series of clotheslines and climbed over the top to win. With a clean win, he was put on last. Hogan, who had been out for months doing a movie, covered that by doing the biggest injury angle thus far in his WWF run, after being squashed by Earthquake (John Tenta). There was no question at the time it was Hogan vs. Earthquake that drew the big PPV numbers and was the real main event. Warrior was put on last, not so much because he had the title, but because he was going over clean. The feeling was Hogan vs. Earthquake was a hotter feud. They wanted Hogan's hand up, but wanted to keep Earthquake strong to continue the feud at house shows. So they did a finish where both were fighting outside the ring, Hogan slammed the 400-pound Earthquake on the table after Jimmy Hart (Quake's manager) had accidentally hit his charge with his megaphone. Hogan jumped into the ring to beat the count. Earthquake laid out Hogan after the match until Big Bossman made the save (since Hogan wasn't working a full-time schedule, Bossman was used as his understudy to work with Earthquake in the cities Hogan wasn't appearing in).

It was another successful show, selling out the Spectrum in Philadelphia, and doing an estimated 507,000 buys on PPV. What's notable is that was very close to the Hogan vs. Warrior WrestleMania match a few months earlier (550,000 buys), making it one of the few times SummerSlam has ever come close to the WrestleMania numbers of the same year.

The fourth SummerSlam, on August 26, 1991, back in Madison Square Garden was billed as "The Match Made in Heaven and The Match Made in Hell."

It was promoted as a double headliner, with Hogan & Warrior in a two-on-three match with General Adnan (longtime AWA performer Sheik Adnan Al-Kaissie, used as a heel Iraqi manager coming off a legitimate war between the U.S. and Iraq that ended months earlier) & Col. Mustafa (Iron Sheik remade as Iraqi) & Sgt. Slaughter (in his heel role) with Sid Justice (formerly Sid Vicious as referee). The match was nothing special, ending when Hogan pinned Slaughter once again with a legdrop.

That was "The Match Made in Hell," perhaps for good reason for certain people. This was the show where all the problems with Vince McMahon and Jim Hellwig (Warrior) surfaced.

The McMahon version, and WWF version told for years, including on the hit piece "Rise of Fall of the Ultimate Warrior" DVD, is that before the match, Warrior held up McMahon for more money on the day of the show or he wouldn't work, and after the match, McMahon fired him.

At the time, everyone in the company believed that story to be true, that Warrior was demanding equal money to Hogan (who was clearly the bigger draw of the two). McMahon pacified him to get through the advertised match, and then fired him.

"About holding you up for money, you got that wrong too," said Warrior when the DVD came out. "Of course it's a fantasy you created, so that makes it true in your twisted mind. There was an issue about a WrestleMania VII payoff, but the strong arming being done was by you and your conniving financial thug at the time, Doug Sages (WWE's Chief Financial Officer at the time), not me. Instead of being straightforward with me about what the payoff was going to be, you kept dragging out avoiding any discussion about it while Sages unethically concocted a counterfeit loan to me, which I knew nothing about till much later, say, around SummerSlam time. How coincidental. When I called you on it, you duplicitously scribbled down and rushed me a letter praising me for my contributions to the company, my one-of-a-kind work ethic, and that you were proud to have me not just as a talent, but know me as a friend. And then, surprise, you pulled a 180 on me and courageously suspended me after the 1991 SummerSlam match by handing me a tough condescending letter."

Hulk Hogan's version, which like most Hulk Hogan stories, is to be listened to purely for entertainment purposes, was that when he found out, he told Vince to have Iron Sheik break Warrior's leg during the match to teach him a lesson, but McMahon told him he didn't want to risk a lawsuit and would handle it his way.

On July 12, 1991, there was a New York Times story ripping on Hulk Hogan for using steroids and tying it in with a major media story at the time that Lyle Alzado, a pro football star, was dying from steroids (Alzado later died, although it is extremely questionable whether it was steroids that caused his death). But it immediately tainted Hogan not so much in the eyes of wrestling fans, but with the movers and shakers, heat that led to McMahon telling Hogan to take a year off after the 1992 WrestleMania. A few days earlier, another New York Times sportswriter wrote a story, "Is Pro Wrestling Down for the Count?" because of the trial of Dr. George Zahorian, convicted of selling steroids to pro wrestlers in the dressing room of shows in Pennsylvania. Hogan's image was shattered, which hurt him greatly for a number of years, although he did bounce back.

Based on legal documentation between the two, on July 13, 1991, Hellwig made his play, looking for more money. McMahon agreed to pay Hellwig \$550,000 for his match at the previous WrestleMania against Savage. Considering the revenue that show generated on 400,000 buys, that seemed like a ridiculously high number for anyone but Hogan, let alone a guy in the No. 2 match. For SummerSlam, Hellwig asked to be guaranteed the same money as Hogan. McMahon also agreed to pay him 5% of the gate for every house show (the same as Hogan) and the same merchandise cut as Hogan. The agreement was also that any PPV he appeared on, that no other wrestler, including Hogan, could earn more money than him. McMahon agreed to it and signed it, apparently to get through SummerSlam, since in those days the PPV matches were set up months earlier and advertising was already out.

"The Match Made in Heaven" was the storyline wedding of Randy Savage & Elizabeth, who were actually married in real life on December 30, 1984. The wedding was actually put on last and it was a unique environment. The audience at that time, particularly in MSG, was still people looking to see fights. There absolutely were people into the wedding at the show, but they were the minority. Being put on last, people were leaving as it was going on and most were not that into it, but there were women crying and it ended up a pretty famous television angle. The show did 405,000 buys on PPV, well down from previous efforts, but the wrestling industry was starting to cool off. The publicized PPV wedding jinxed their real marriage, which ended the next year.

The show also had two other significant bouts. Bret Hart's IC title win over Mr. Perfect (Curt Hennig) was the key moment in the ascension of Hart from being a popular mid-card babyface to being viewed as one of the company's top stars. It was also, up to that point in time, the greatest SummerSlam match in history and the first (but hardly the last) SummerSlam match considered a classic.

And the legendary tag team of the era, The Road Warriors, then called The Legion of Doom, beat the Nasty Boys to win the WWF tag team titles, becoming the first (and as it turned out only) tag team in history to win the NWA, WWF and AWA tag team titles.

In some ways, the biggest SummerSlam was August 29, 1992, at Wembley Stadium in London. The show drew a sellout of 78,927 fans paying \$2.2 million. While publicly WrestleMania III is considered the WWF's all-time record setting show, the company's own internal records have this show as being the largest attended show in company history. There are reports of shows internationally at different times with gigantic claimed crowds and video has surfaced of a packed stadium of 80,000 in Greece for a Jim Londos match. But with the exception of two 1995 shows in South Korea, and those were mostly people essentially ordered to attend and not paying for tickets, this would be the largest verifiable pro wrestling crowd in history.

On the flip side, PPV numbers dropped to about 280,000. The match aired on a several hour tape delay, but communication was very different in those days. Many have claimed the big decline was due to it not airing live, but that's using modern logic that didn't really apply. The number of people who knew the results before it aired in the U.S. were minuscule, and the fact is, the early WrestleManias were airing on tape delay on the West Coast. It was more a combination of a weak marquee show (although many would say it was the best SummerSlam in the ring to date) and a declining business.

One thing that can't be emphasized was how important Hogan was to PPV numbers, and this was the first major show since his hiatus due to his being a lightning rod for bad publicity for the company due to the steroid issue. The U.K., despite this turnout, has never gotten another major PPV, and the buy rate of this show and blame for it not airing live has been this long-lasting memory within the company and why it was never considered again. But the buy rate was more due to Hogan not being there, a significant fall in popularity that hit the business overall. The fact was, numbers declined from this level in subsequent years.

They also went with WWE champion Savage, in a face vs. face title match with Warrior. This was during the height of steroid testing and Warrior looked to be about 225 pounds, and this is when people thought it was a new guy playing the character because he shrunk so much. Savage was counted out of the ring, keeping the title, when Ric Flair put him in the figure four leglock outside the ring. Warrior made the save for Savage.

But far more remembered was the match put on last, where Davey Boy Smith won the IC title from Bret Hart in 25:40 in what would likely rank high on a list in a poll of greatest matches in SummerSlam history.

The 1993 show was at the Palace in Auburn Hills, MI, a show built around Lex Luger's chase of WWF champion Yokozuna. The original planned main event for the show was to be Bret Hart beating Hulk Hogan to win the WWF title, and be the passing of the torch from Hogan, then 40, to the company's new star. The idea at the time was they would run two tours, one with Hart as champion defending, and the other that would run medium markets during the week, but big cities on the weekend, with Hogan working weekend shows. McMahon's vision was for Hogan to play the role Bruno Sammartino played in his last few years of his regular career (not the second career during the expansion), but working more regularly than Sammartino would do. However, Hogan was so mad at the suggestion of losing to Hart, who he considered too small to headline or carry the title that he told McMahon he would drop the title to Yokozuna and then gave his notice. He quit, and did a television series ("Thunder in Paradise") while working for New Japan Pro Wrestling. Pro wrestling history was later rewritten that Eric Bischoff stole Hogan from the WWF, but there

was nearly a one year gap between Hogan leaving WWF and signing with WCW.

With Hogan gone, McMahon made the decision to create a new Hogan, and the best candidate on his roster was former WCW champion Lex Luger. Luger was not catching on as the heel, The Narcissist, posing into a mirror. So he was turned All-American babyface, with stars and stripes on his trunks. The idea was he was almost as tall as Hogan, far more muscular, in fact, he arguably had the best physique in the business at the time and somehow was able to keep it even while being steroid tested (later he admitted he was using stuff all along but knowing how to beat the tests). His physique stood out even more because everyone was getting either fat, soft or small because it's likely only a few wrestlers on the roster were sophisticated enough to beat the tests, meaning the vast majority were clean. Luger was a genuine drawing card at points in WCW before his character turned so many times.

Luger was put on a bus all summer, "the Lex Express," going from city-to-city, taken out of the ring, and building everything to the title chase against Yokozuna. It started when Luger slammed Yokozuna in a highly publicized angle in July, something Hogan never did. Luger was pushed specifically as the newer younger and stronger Hogan. That may have been a mistake, because trying to get the next big thing, a copycat of Hogan, right down to the posing routine, was the wrong way to go. When the company finally got a legitimate replacement as a Hogan level star when Steve Austin started really hitting it big in late 1997, it was a character altogether different from Hogan.

It's not that Luger wasn't popular or didn't get over. He did. But it was not nearly to the level hoped for. But nobody knew that when SummerSlam arrived on August 30, 1993, at the Palace in Auburn Hills, MI. The usual McMahon philosophy when it came to the title was often putting it on the babyface, if anything, too early. There's little doubt in 1989, there was money to be made in delaying Hogan's title win over Savage, who was one of the hottest heels ever at the time, but the company ran with the face champion. Ditto, in 1992, they put Savage over Flair in their first meeting when they also could have had a long successful program, which was killed because the dynamic of why it would draw was gone when it was Flair chasing Savage. But here, McMahon was talked into SummerSlam being that teased title change, to have him win via count out, and save the title win for WrestleMania.

The difference was Hogan and Savage were proven WWF commodities. Luger was on the ascension, and people were sure he was winning, and the count out was a flat finish to the summer-long story and he never regained the momentum he had going into the match. While they announced 23,954 fans that night, the real number was barely 14,000. But the entire business was way down in popularity and the 14,000 figure was actually the largest crowd for a show with the exception of WrestleMania (which drew an announced 15,045, not a sellout, in Las Vegas) all year. PPV buys were down to about 250,000, and they were hoping for WrestleMania numbers with the Luger build.

As history shows, Luger didn't get over like they had hoped for and was a flop as a top babyface in WWF. Internally, people jumped off his bandwagon and onto that of Bret Hart. The irony is the original plan was for this show to be Hart's coronation as the top star in the company beating Hogan, then Luger's coronation, but it ended up that it was the next WrestleMania that the title was back in the hands of Hart.

The August 29, 1994 show at the United Center in Chicago had a double-headliner. Bret Hart beat Owen Hart in 32:17 in a cage match via hooking Owen's leg into the cage and escaping. The match went way long, leaving the finale, the real Undertaker returning beating the imposter Undertaker (played by Brian Lee) at 9:10 to be a poor finale, which pretty much ended the feud after one match. From a historical perspective, besides Leslie Nielsen and George Kennedy reprising their "Naked Gun" characters in several skits where they were looking for Undertaker (those in WWF loved Nielsen), the show also featured football legend Walter Payton in the corner of Razor Ramon (Scott Hall) when he won the IC title from Diesel (Kevin Nash).

On August 27, 1995, from the old Pittsburgh Civic Arena, the show included the SummerSlam debut of HHH (as snob Hunter Hearst Helmsley, pinning Bob Holly in a prelim); and the two main events were Diesel keeping the WWF title pinning Mabel (who later become Big Daddy Voodoo) while IC champ Shawn Michaels beating Ramon in 24:58 of a ladder match. While this ladder match is not as well remembered as the 1994 match at WrestleMania, and the risk levels didn't match later bouts with Edge & Christian vs. Dudley vs. Hardy's, it was, for its time, an incredible match and top tier in that period in WWF history. The main event, on the other hand, was among the worst SummerSlam finales in history.

On August 18, 1996, the show came to the Gund Arena in Cleveland. This was one of the weaker SummerSlams ever, with little memorable except an excellent main event title match where Michaels pinned Vader in 18:59.

The new era of WWE was blooming on August 3, 1997, back in the New York market at the Meadowlands, now called the Continental Airlines Arena. It was not a great show, but it was newsworthy. Steve Austin, rapidly gaining fire as the next big thing in pro wrestling, got hit with a sit out tombstone piledriver by Owen Hart during their IC title match. Austin, scheduled to win with the stone cold stunner, was paralyzed momentarily. Hart stalled and was largely able to schoolboy himself with Austin trying to at least appear to be holding him, about eight minutes before the scheduled finish. Austin wasn't able to wrestle for several months and several doctors told him his career was over. He was considering retiring and going into acting. He was kept on television each week, doing one angle after another that involved him doing little physical, selling nothing and not taking bumps.

When he slowly started wrestling again, he was a bigger star than ever before. His career exploded with an angle with Mike Tyson in January, and a WWF title win at the next WrestleMania, and shortly after, became the hottest commodity the company ever had, eventually breaking almost all of Hogan's box office, PPV and merchandise records. At his peak, he earned \$13 million in a calendar year, breaking Hogan's peak record of \$8 million.

However, he never fully recovered from the injuries and the neck problems stemming from a combination of that move, the accumulation of years of wrestling, and being born with spinal stenosis, led to his missing a year due to neck surgery, and eventually his career ending in 2003.

The main event saw Bret Hart win the WWF title from Undertaker in a match that had he lost, he could never wrestle again in the U.S. Michaels, then Hart's big rival, was the referee. Michaels went to hit Hart with a chair, but Hart ducked and he accidentally hit Undertaker, allowing Hart to win. In doing so, Michaels went heel for a legendary run that included the formation of DX a few months later. This show was heavily featured in two documentaries, "Wrestling with Shadows" and "The Life and Times of Owen Hart."

As far as popularity, the biggest SummerSlam in history was on August 30, 1998, in Madison Square Garden. WWF had caught fire a few months earlier and a summer-long build for an Austin vs. Undertaker main event, one of the great match builds in company history, produced 700,000 PPV buys. This was the largest number for a SummerSlam in history, a record that still stands. At the time, it was the third biggest number in pro wrestling history for any show, and to this day, it's the second biggest number for a non-WrestleMania show.

Austin pinned Undertaker to retain the title in 20:52, but perhaps as important was the IC title match. While Hunter Hearst Helmsley, by this point a babyface, won the title from a heel Rocky Maivia in a ladder match, the MSG crowd was going so crazy for Maivia, in particular when he hit the people's elbow, that this is generally pointed to as the night when it became apparent Maivia was going to be the industry's next genuine superstar.

That PPV number was expected to be broken on August 22, 1999, when the SummerSlam with by far the most mainstream publicity took place. WWF was financially doing record business, but to the media, it

was reeling due to the death in May of Owen Hart. In particular, it was WWF's handling of the death, in keeping the PPV going after Hart died from a fall from the ceiling at Kemper Arena with his blood drying in the ring. The company also never informed the public at the show that Hart had died. In what was a brilliant maneuver at the time, McMahon ponied up big money and signed Jesse Ventura to referee.

Keep in mind that Ventura the year before had won election as Governor of Minnesota. While Ventura is not remembered as being a good governor by those in the state, because he spoke so well and was such a novelty, a third party candidate who didn't speak like a normal politician, he became a huge political figure on the national scene. Ventura, after the death of Hart, was negative about pro wrestling in general, in particular the way it treated wrestlers and lack of a union. But offering Ventura this gig made him quiet down in his criticism. Far more important, the big pro wrestling controversy went from a sleazy company that continued a show after a performer died in the ring and didn't inform its fans, to the story of the controversy of a sitting governor refereeing the main event. The latter is the kind of controversy that does create cash, unlike the former.

The show did 600,000 buys, lower than expectations, particularly with all the mainstream coverage like never before, but still among the biggest for the show of all-time. Ventura refereed a three-way match, at the time called a "Triangle" match, between champion Austin and challengers HHH and Mankind (Mick Foley). The original finish was for HHH to win the title, pinning Austin. However, with Ventura involved, they wanted a babyface to get their hand raised and HHH was the only heel in the match. So Mankind pinned Austin, and the next day on Raw, dropped it to HHH. That also allowed an Austin vs. HHH feud to have more legs since HHH had never pinned him to win the title. There were no matches on this show that were legendary, but it was a strong show overall with most matches solid to good.

On August 27, 2000, in Raleigh, there was a legendary match, with Edge & Christian retaining the tag team titles over the Dudleys and Hardys in a TLC match, which helped put the idea of the TLC match on the map. It was also notable that with a \$1,151,940 gate with 15,603 paid and 17,002 total, it was the 7th largest of all-time in North America and largest non-Mania gate. It was the first time SummerSlam cracked seven figures. A funny note on the show was an ad for "Vinnie's Restaurant" in Raleigh. While most think Vince McMahon grew up in New York, Florida (where his father lived and where he now has one of his homes) or Connecticut, both he and Linda McMahon were from North Carolina. The restaurant was named after him since he had been involved in the original financing. The main event saw Rock retain the WWF title in a Triple Threat match, as the three-ways were renamed, over HHH and Kurt Angle.

On August 19, 2001, in San Jose, SummerSlam was the first PPV after the Invasion angle. The show did 570,000 buys. In doing so, there were a series of matches for WCW titles on the show. The main event was WWF champion Steve Austin vs. Kurt Angle, but since they booked a DQ loss for Austin, they went with the other main event, Booker T losing the WCW title to The Rock as the finale. That's the trivia on why the WCW title was put on last. The show also featured WWF tag champs Diamond Dallas Page & Chris Canyon against WCW tag champs Undertaker & Kane. Undertaker & Kane won the unification match that was really a squash match, and one of the real keys in showing the WWF vs. WCW feud was being mishandled. They also unified the lighter weight title with X-Pac (WCW cruiserweight champion) beating Tajiri (WWF light heavyweight champion).

As far as why they did the DQ, the feeling is they didn't want to hurt Angle's momentum, but the plan at the time was for Austin as champion to work with Rock (in title vs. title matches) and HHH so he had to keep the title. The two had a killer match that stole the show.

The August 25, 2002, show at the Nassau Coliseum, in Uniondale, NY, was not only the return to the New York market, but the return of Michaels after more than four years out of WWE rings, and the coronation of Brock Lesnar as the company's newest top star.

Lesnar had just been brought to the main roster and was given the monster push. His big breakthrough match was the main event, where he was to beat The Rock and win the WWF title. Rock was on his way out as a regular with his acting career taking off. He had been done with full-time touring and was on the verge of cutting back to only a few shows a year, which after 2004, became only a few appearances for about six years. He was the right guy for Lesnar to beat on this stage to put the exclamation point to fans that Lesnar was wrestling's next superstar. Business was still good, doing 540,000 buys for the combination of that main event and Michaels over HHH in a non-sanctioned match.

The main notes from the show were that it was considered not only the best SummerSlam event in history, but among the best WWF shows in history, featuring strong undercard matches like Angle vs. Rey Mysterio, Flair vs. Jericho, Edge vs. Eddie Guerrero, Lance Storm & Christian vs. Booker T & Goldust for the tag team titles and Rob Van Dam vs. Chris Benoit. Rock, the face, ended up booed, as it was a combination of New York, the backlash against him for leaving and people getting behind Lesnar as the new big thing, just as they had gotten behind Rock at SummerSlam four years earlier.

The August 24, 2003 version, in Phoenix, was another two match show. Shortly after Lesnar had won the WWF title, the company changed names to WWE, and a second title was created, called the world title, using a replica of the title belt that Flair wore in WCW. Lesnar's title, at this point won by Angle, was the key belt on Smackdown. Angle beat Lesnar in the show-stealing match with the ankle lock submission in 21:19. The World title, on Raw, was given to HHH as opposed to winning it, and on this show, he was in an elimination chamber match with Jericho, Michaels, Bill Goldberg, Randy Orton and Nash, which he won by pinning Goldberg in the finals after Goldberg had pinned Orton, Michaels and Jericho in succession.

SummerSlam came to Canada for the first time on August 15, 2003, at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto. It was the most enthusiastic crowd the company had for a show in months. However, by the end of the night, those in the company seemed mad about it. The crowd crapped on a JBL vs. Undertaker title match, and cheered heels HHH and Orton like crazy (even though Orton was facing Canadian WWE champion Benoit). The main event of a show that was down to 320,000 buys saw Orton at 24 years, 4 months, become the youngest champion in company history. He was billed at this point as the youngest world champion in pro wrestling history, although he was actually older than Lou Thesz, Danno O'Mahoney and Kerry Von Erich when they each won their first titles.

What ended up being the second most purchased SummerSlam of all-time was on August 21, 2005, from the MCI Center in Washington, DC, and it was all about the first and only singles match with Hogan vs. Michaels. The show did 640,000 buys with a match that told more of a story outside the ring.

This was the battle of egos and the affection of Vince McMahon. Michaels did promos about how he wasn't going to do the job, but in physical angles, sold like crazy. In the end, neither wanted to lose. Hogan had a creative control clause in his contract and he was refusing to lose. Michaels was trying to manipulate that they'd do a two match series, he could win the first but he'd lose in the second. It was Michaels who had originally asked to do the program, but then did not want to lose. He requested losing via DQ when Hogan made it clear he wasn't losing. Hogan, with his creative control, said there was only one finish, and it was not negotiable, which was a legdrop. Michaels still tried to get a heel win first, and he'd put Hogan over clean in a cage match the next month on PPV. Hogan said if Michaels did the legdrop finish in the first match, in the rematch, in a cage, they could do the photo finish. Hogan would go through the door. Michaels would go over the top. They would land at the same time, making it appear to be a tie. But even then, Hogan would be the winner via photo finish. McMahon told Michaels he couldn't back out of the match and there was no negotiating the first match finish because Hogan refused any other finish. Michaels did the legdrop finish, but over exaggerated bumps throughout the match to make it look completely silly. It was still one of the more entertaining Hogan matches of the past decade, because even when Michaels is making fun of his opponent in a

match, he's that good. Then the next day, on television, Michaels made more fun of the match, basically saying Hogan was so athletically superior he couldn't compete at the level, mocking the entire match, and all but telling everyone it was a fake match. He also said that Hogan was going home and not doing the rematch on the next show and said Hogan would only come back to WWE for the money.

Another reason the show did so well was because on the final TV, they teased like crazy that Bret Hart was going to show up. Even though there was no deal in place, they strongly hinted he'd come out, and Hart, having been gone for eight years, his return was perhaps the biggest thing possible in WWE at the time. In the title matches, John Cena beat Jericho to keep the WWE title, and Batista beat JBL to keep the world title.

The August 20, 2006, show in Boston, was a show with essentially five different main event caliber matches. Hogan returned to face Orton in what was probably the biggest drawing match on the show, but there was also Flair vs. Foley I Quit match to climax a summer-long feud, and Michaels & HHH vs. Vince & Shane McMahon. And there was the two title bouts, with WWE champion Edge beating Cena, and world champ Booker T losing via DQ to Batista.

They were back in East Rutherford, NJ, on August 26, 2007, the final SummerSlam of its first quarter-century in the New York market. The finish was changed two days before the show for Cena to win, instead of the originally planned title change for Orton, in the show-stealer. The other title match, with Batista beating world champion Great Khali via DQ in 6:57 may have been the worst title match ever at a SummerSlam.

The August 17, 2008, show in Indianapolis was more noteworthy for the angle involving Michaels, who was going to retire, until Jericho punched his wife (who he actually potatoed and gave her a fat lip and she was bleeding legitimately). It was a strong logically booked show that ended up being among the better SummerSlam events. The show had two major title matches with Punk keeping the world title over JBL, and HHH keeping the WWE belt over Khali. But even more important was a Batista over Cena match of the two biggest stars of that period, and Undertaker over Edge in a Hell in a Cell match.

After beginning its run as a Northeast fixture, SummerSlam followed the Dodgers a generation earlier in migrating to Southern California. The attempt to promote the show as a second WrestleMania, every year at the Staples Center, with Fan Axxess, has been a mixed bag. The Staples Center always sells out. They are able to make connections and having parties with celebrities. But to the fans, it is not another WrestleMania, and in 2011, buys in North America fell to 180,000, lower than even during the 90s.

The August 23, 2009 show was headlined by Punk beating Jeff Hardy to win the world title in a ladder match as Hardy's contract expired and he was leaving the promotion. They also had another Orton vs. Cena match, this time with Orton as champion and keeping the title. Michaels & HHH, as DX, beat second generation wrestlers Ted DiBiase Jr. & Cody Rhodes, whose fathers were headliners on the early shows.

August 15, 2010, was built around the Nexus angle, where a group of rookies on a television show vying for a contract joined forces and beat down one star after another. It's basically the angle TNA is now doing with Aces and 8s. Nexus, which was Wade Barrett & David Otunga & Heath Slater & Skip Sheffield (Ryback) & Darren Young & Michael Tarver & Justin Gabriel, lost an elimination match to Cena & Daniel Bryan (who started on Nexus but was fired and brought back as a face) & Jericho & Edge & R-Truth & John Morrison & Bret Hart as Team WWE. In the title matches, World champion Kane beat Mysterio and WWE champ Sheamus lost via DQ to Orton.

Last year's show, on August 14, 2011, which did the lowest SummerSlam domestic numbers in history, saw Punk beat Cena with HHH as referee to win the WWE title, only to lose in a Money in the

Bank cash-in to Alberto Del Rio in 12 seconds, while Orton beat Christian to win the world title in a no holds barred match.

## \*\*\*\*\* FIRST 24 YEARS OF SUMMERSLAM MAIN EVENTS

1988 - Hulk Hogan & Randy Savage b Andre the Giant & Ted DiBiase.

1989 - Hulk Hogan & Brutus Beefcake b Randy Savage & Zeus.

1990 - Hulk Hogan b Earthquake John Tenta via count out.

1991 - Hulk Hogan & Ultimate Warrior b Sgt. Slaughter & Gen. Adnan & Col. Mustafa (Iron Sheik).

1992 - Ultimate Warrior b Randy Savage via count out.

1993 - Lex Luger b WWF champion Yokozuna via count out.

1994 - WWF champion Bret Hart b Owen Hart in cage match.

1995 - WWF champion Diesel b Mabel.

1996 - WWF champion Shawn Michaels b Vader.

1997 - Bret Hart b Undertaker to win WWF title with Shawn Michaels as referee.

1998 - WWF champion Steve Austin b The Undertaker.

1999 - Mankind (Mick Foley) won three-way over Steve Austin and HHH to win the WWF title.

2000 - WWF champion The Rock won three-way over Kurt Angle and HHH.

2001 - Kurt Angle b WWF champion Steve Austin via DQ.

2002 - Brock Lesnar b The Rock to win WWF title.

2003 - World champion HHH won Elimination Chamber match over Bill Goldberg, Chris Jericho, Shawn Michaels, Randy Orton and Kevin Nash.

2004 - Randy Orton b Chris Benoit to win World championship.

2005 - Hulk Hogan b Shawn Michaels.

2006 - WWE champion Edge b John Cena.

2007 - WWE champion John Cena b Randy Orton.

2008 - Undertaker b Edge in a Hell in a Cell match.

2009 - C.M. Punk b Jeff Hardy in a ladder match to win World title.

2010 - John Cena & Daniel Bryan & Chris Jericho & Edge & R-Truth & John Morrison & Bret Hart b Nexus (Wade Barrett & David Otunga & Heath Slater & Skip Sheffield & Darren Young & Michael Tarver & Justin Gabriel in an elimination match.

2011 - C.M. Punk b John Cena with HHH as referee to win WWE title.

Alberto Del Rio cashed in his Money in the Bank briefcase and then beat Punk to win the title.

2012 - Brock Lesnar b HHH

MOST MAIN EVENTS: Hulk Hogan 5, John Cena 4, HHH 4, Shawn Michaels 3, Randy Savage 3, Steve Austin 3, Randy Orton 3, Undertaker 3, Edge 3, Bret Hart 3, Ultimate Warrior 2, Kurt Angle 2, The Rock 2, Brock Lesnar 2, Shawn Michaels 2, Kevin Nash 2, Chris Jericho 2, C.M, Punk 2

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#### **MOST APPEARANCES**

15 - Undertaker

13 - HHH

12 - Shawn Michaels

11 - Bret Hart

10 - Edge, Chris Jericho

9 - Rey Mysterio, John Cena

8 - Kane, Randy Orton

6- Hulk Hogan, X-Pac (or 1-2-3 Kid), Kurt Angle, C.M. Punk

5- Davey Boy Smith, Ultimate Warrior, Randy Savage, Ted DiBiase Sr., Owen Hart, Billy Gunn, Mick Foley, The Rock, Matt Hardy, Jeff Hardy, Christian, Big Show, Eddie Guerrero, Chris Benoit, Booker T

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#### **SUMMERSLAM'S GREATEST MATCHES**

**8/26/91:** Bret Hart vs. Mr. Perfect for IC title

**8/29/92:** Ultimate Warrior beats WWF champion Randy Savage via count out; Davey Boy Smith wins IC title from Bret Hart

**8/30/93:** Bret Hart vs. Jerry Lawler

**8/29/94:** WWF champion Bret Hart vs. Owen Hart cage match

**8/27/95:** Shawn Michaels vs. Razor Ramon ladder match

**8/18/96:** Shawn Michaels vs. Vader for WWE title

**8/30/98:** HHH vs. The Rock for IC title

**8/27/00:** Edge & Christian vs. Hardys vs. Dudleys TLC match for tag titles

**8/19/01:** Steve Austin vs. Kurt Angle for WWF title

**8/25/02:** Shawn Michaels vs. HHH unsanctioned match

**8/24/03:** Kurt Angle vs. Brock Lesnar for WWE title

**8/15/04:** Chris Benoit vs. Randy Orton for World title

**8/26/07:** John Cena vs. Randy Orton for WWE title

**8/17/08:** Undertaker vs. Edge Hell in a Cell match

**8/23/09:** C.M. Punk vs. Jeff Hardy for World title in a ladder match

**8/14/11:** Christian vs. Randy Orton No Holds Barred for world title